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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2009

In Today's Papers

Balancing the Normalization of Turkey-Armenian Ties with Azerbaijan's Concerns  
Media outlets report the Azerbaijani President Aliyev's advisor, Nevruz Muhammedov, told APA news agency "Azerbaijan understands Turkey's position," but that Ankara should carry out the process with Armenia "through other paths." "In principle, we are not against the opening of Turkey's border with Armenia," says Muhammedov. "But we demand the question to be resolved through the path that was followed by Turkey's former presidents Turgut Ozal, Suleyman Demirel and Ahmet Necdet Sezer," he stressed. Mainstream Haberturk reports the Azerbaijani lawmaker Nizami Jafarov, the head of the Turkey-Azerbaijan friendship group, as saying that giant gas and oil projects would be "frozen" if Turkey opens its border with Armenia. Papers also report Armenian President Sargsian told Mediamax news agency, "We are ready to normalize the ties with Turkey without setting preconditions, but it seems that Turkey is not." Sargsian added their desire for normalization doesn't mean Yerevan has changed its views on the genocide question.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Ali Babacan went to Yerevan to attend the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) foreign ministers' meeting on Thursday. "We want a comprehensive solution and full normalization," Babacan was quoted by CNN-Turk as telling reporters aboard his plane en route to Yerevan. Babacan noted "the road to a solution must definitely run parallel with talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia."

Papers carry an opinion survey by the Ararat Strategic Research Center, according to which 61 percent of Armenians oppose closer ties with Turkey. Only 11 percent support the Armenian administration's policy toward normalization with Turkey. 74 percent of those whose views were canvassed were Armenian citizens whereas 26 percent of them were Armenians living in Diaspora.

Editorial Commentary on Turkey-Armenia-Azerbaijan

Erdal Safak wrote in mainstream Sabah: "The U.S., Russia and France

co-chair the Minsk Group. Unfortunately, the Minsk Group was unable to end the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia during the last 17 years. In order to normalize the ties between Turkey and Armenia and to create the right atmosphere for the Turkish and Azeri publics, we suggest Turkey take a more active role and become the fourth co-chair of the group. As a co-chair, Turkey can initiate a new negotiation process that is based on win-win principles within a limited timeframe, just like the one in Cyprus."

Ibrahim Karagul wrote in Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak: "Normalized relations between Turkey and Armenia will not only be to Armenia's interest but will be to Turkey and Azerbaijan's interest as well. The issues of opening the Armenian border and ending the occupation of Azeri territory should advance parallel to each other. This whole issue is the result of a power struggle between Russia and the West. If Russia loses Armenia, all energy projects will be re-arranged and a new position will be determined for the Caucasus. This is why the Azeri government and the public has been provoked by Russia and its allies. If Azeri president Aliyev gets closer to Russia and turns his back to the West, this will be a major mistake. Armenia is definitely very important for the West, however, Azerbaijan is much more important. For the time being, Azerbaijan is being tested by Russia, Iran and others against the possibilities of Armenia moving towards the West. Therefore, Turkey should immediately eliminate this crisis in trust."

Clinton and Talat Meet in Washington  
Media outlets are pleased to note that Turkish Cypriot Leader Mehmet Ali Talat was able to meet with U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and discuss a solution process for the divided island.

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Mainstream Haberturk reports "Talat Met with Clinton," and notes "Previously, the Greek lobby postponed his meetings," in the U.S. but "Talat was also able meet members of Congress and other civil society organizations." Mainstream Hurriyet reports "The U.S. Gives Support to the Solution Process," as "Talat met with Clinton." Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "Clinton Promises to Talat Support for a Solution in Cyprus." CNN Turk comments, "The U.S. Is Warm to Turkish Cyprus," and notes, "The Obama administration regards the Turkish Cypriots warmly," as "Clinton and Talat had positive meetings."

Iraq's al-Hashimi: Green Light to Turkish Base in northern Iraq  
Mainstream Sabah reports the Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi told al-Hurra television that Iraq should either eliminate the PKK or allow Turkey to set up a "temporary base" in the region to "cleanse" terrorism in the mountains. Hashimi said Turkey was right in its concerns, and noted the three-side mechanism of Turkey, Iraq and the U.S. continued its work. Sabah says the PKK-affiliated Firat News Agency reported April 7 that Turkey would set up a base in Diyana, which was to be built by the Mak-Yol company in Turkey.

Selected Media Criticize the Stoning of Female Demonstrators in Afghanistan  
Mainstream secularist, along with liberal and leftist outlets, criticize the attack on women protestors yesterday in Afghanistan. Islamist outlets refrain from reporting on the incident. Mainstream Milliyet lauds the women protestors' efforts in the headline "300 Women Heroes," and the paper reports "The women's protest was peaceful," but "Afghan men attacked the women." Leftist Taraf headlines "Stoning to Those Who Say 'No' To Rape," and notes "male protestors threw stones and shouted 'Death to Christian Slavery' at the three hundred women who protested against marital rape." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports "Stones Rained on Women" as "a peaceful women's protest was attacked by stone-throwing religious fundamentalists," and "women police formed a barricade between the two protests." Liberal Radikal reports "Men Stone Afghan Women Calling for Rights," Mainstream Haberturk reports "Women Are Stoned As They Protest a Rape Law." Mainstream NTV headlines, "Women Who Want Rights Are Stoned" in Afghanistan.

DTP Protests Tuesday's PKK Detentions  
Papers report that on Wednesday in several cities in the mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey, the pro-Kurdish DTP staged demonstrations

to protest the detention of party members in recent operations against the PKK. On Tuesday, 52 suspects including three DTP provincial deputy chairs were taken into custody in police operations in 12 provinces across Turkey. In Van, DTP lawmaker Ozdal Ucer said they would be "on the streets" until their friends are released. In Diyarbakir, DTP lawmakers joined by mayor Osman Baydemir staged a protest march that included 10,000, papers report.

#### Jobless Rate Reaches Record High in Turkey

Media outlets report the Turkish Statistics Institution (TUIK) released on its webpage the unemployment rate in Turkey made a "peak," soaring to 15.5 percent in January, marking the highest point in the history of Turkey. The number of the unemployed for January rose by 1,059,000 and reached 3.65 million.

Mainstream Vatan says these figures make Turkey the "unemployment champion" in Europe, and on a global scale, rank second behind South Africa. Liberal Radikal underlines the unemployment rate among young people went up from 21.2 percent to 27.9 percent, which means one out of every three young people is unemployed. Analysts predict further rises in unemployment in the months, adding to the pressure on the AKP government to finalize fast a new loan accord with the IMF.

#### Ambassador Jeffrey Responds to Students at 'Model UN Conference' in Istanbul

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Mainstream Milliyet reports Ambassador Jeffrey spoke at the opening of the "International Model UN Conference" held at Istanbul's Robert College to which 700 students from 13 countries participated. "Over the coming 60-70 years, the most important issue you will face in international politics will be the world's resources," said Jeffrey.

Ambassador Jeffrey answered a question about North Korea's nuclear weapons and noted that these weapons posed a threat to the U.S. and the entire world. Jeffrey recalled the U.S. has not used nuclear weapons since WW II, and underlined that President Obama announced a target to reduce nukes by 2012. On another question regarding U.S. intentions over the natural resources in the Middle East, Jeffrey said "We want energy independence for all countries."

#### Editorial Commentary on General Basbug's Annual Speech

Fehmi Kuru wrote in Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak: "I have difficulty understanding Basbug's concerns for religious sects. Some people open Turkish language schools all over the world and fly the Turkish flag in these places and yet, they are considered as a "threat" in Turkey. Democratic states, if they are truly democratic, do not get scared of individuals or groups."

Kadri Gursel wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Why is Turkish media attaching such a big importance to the TGS Chief's speech? The answer is this: the Turkish military is a Turkish reality which has a negative impact on the country by intervening in politics and it has a negative influence on the Kurdish issue. However, Basbug's speech reflected many positive changes in the Turkish reality."

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal Radikal: "With his speech, General Basbug, in a way, shared his thoughts regarding the constitutional change and a partial amnesty with the government and the public. His milder approach was noticed regarding many issues but not regarding the religious sects. I wonder if this could be an issue between PM Erdogan and General Basbug? It is hard to guess, whether Basbug will mention this issue at his next week's press conference but it will be foolish to think that the timing of such a speech was just a coincidence."

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- Ankara Prosecutor's Office saw "no need for investigation" against the pro-Kurdish DTP leader Ahmet Turk and party deputy Selahattin Demirtas who addressed in Kurdish a recent DTP party group meeting in the parliament.

- Labor unions and professional associations including DISK, KESK, TMMOB and TTB announced they were determined to celebrate May Day in Taksim Square in the heart of Istanbul. DISK chairman Suleyman Celebi said Taksim was identified with Labor Day after the killing of 36 people in Taksim on May 1 in 1977.

- The pro-reunification CTP and the UBP are expected to race in the April 19 general elections in Turkish Cyprus. Recent surveys show the CTP loses votes. The UBP supports negotiations but opposes a federation to reunite the island.

- Turkish markets expect Thursday's meeting of the Central Bank Monetary Board to curb interest rates by 50 points. The curbing of the rates is expected to have a positive effect on markets hit by the economic crisis.

#### World

- President Gul addressed Wednesday the Parliament of Bahrain. "Turkey takes the new US administration's call on disarmament and the joint statements made by the US and Russian Presidents early this month very seriously," said Gul.

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- US special Middle East envoy George Mitchell kicks off his first peace mission to Israel and the Palestinian territories since PM Benjamin Netanyahu took office.

- President Ahmadinejad says Tehran is preparing new proposals to break the deadlock over its nuclear program.

- NATO says it plans to hold military exercises next month in Georgia.

- The US State Department says North Korea has asked US experts overseeing the disablement of its Yongbyon nuclear plant to leave the country.

JEFFREY